

Glacier National Park Going-to-the-Sun Road Project
Tourism Stakeholder Meeting
January 11, 2007
Mountain West Bank, Whitefish

In Attendance: See attached attendee list.

On behalf of park superintendent Mick Holm, Amy Vanderbilt, Communications and Outreach Manager for the Going-to-the-Sun Road Project with the NPS at Glacier National Park expressed gratitude and appreciation for all that local and state tourism stakeholders have already provided regarding the rehabilitation of the Sun Road.

Amy presented a slide show reviewing the damage by heavy rain, snow melt and flooding in November 2006. She explained the Sun Road repair work that will be done this winter as well as what would be accomplished once the snow is cleared in the spring and how this will compound with the 3.5 miles of 2007 scheduled Sun Road rehabilitation work between the west tunnel and Haystack Creek.

She emphasized that the NPS and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are both determined and committed to have public access across the storm damaged sections of the road in time for summer 2007. Plans for the repair of storm damage will be announced as soon as decisions are finalized this winter.

She also discussed the use of no-fee shuttle buses on the Sun Road beginning July 1, 2007, to help mitigate traffic congestion on the road during the 8-10 year Sun Road rehabilitation. The buses will be optional, free and will not compete with interpretive tours like Sun Tours or the Red Buses and will not skip any of the construction lines.

The park has recently contracted with David Evans & Associates (DEA) to produce informational collateral items such as a rack card for guests to explain the shuttle routes, stops, and road work. This brochure will be distributed widely throughout the state and region. Scott Weeks, a senior transportation planner with DEA is working with the park on a transit brochure, project newsletter and other displays and informational materials.

Amy explained that the transit system, transit centers and expanded public information and multi-media services are part of the park's commitment to minimizing potential impacts to visitors throughout the Sun Road rehabilitation.

Through the 2000-2002 Sun Road Citizens Advisory Committee (Linda Anderson and Susie Burch were among the committee members) recommendations were presented to the NPS that later became recommendations in the NPS rehabilitation and mitigation plan and environmental analysis. Through this extensive public involvement process, the NPS compromised on dates for the core summer season and moved the alpine road opening from July 1 back to June 15.

The Sun Road plan and EIS schedule went into effect last fall (Sept. 2006). From now on until the Sun Road rehabilitation is completed (approx. 8-10 years); contractors will be given access to the road for accelerated work before June 15 and after Sept. 15.

During the core summer season (mid-June to mid-Sept.) road work will occur along with public access that will keep traffic delays to a maximum of 30 minutes for a single trip across the 50-mile road.

Bill Hayden and David Restivo, Interpretive Media Specialists at Glacier reviewed changes and shared improvements to the Glacier National Park website that include podcasts, eTours, and a multi-media page. They were given suggestions by the audience to include: de-emphasizing the Going-to-the-Sun Road and highlighting other sections of the park, include hikes and things to do by season, so that guests can research before arrival, and keep the construction and history of the road highlighted positively.

The audience received copies of the messaging survey conducted in 2006 by Burson-Marsteller through cooperation and collaboration with Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission with the use of their most recent database of addresses from recent inquiries. Among other information, this survey demonstrated that the Sun Road is probably the best known feature of the park, that potential park visitors would likely use the no-fee shuttle bus and positively confirmed the following tagline: "Glacier National Park: Nature at its Best" (which will begin to be used in public information and marketing materials).

Jodi Smith and Lisa Jones with Superhost present ideas to the group for training local communities about the flooding and construction issues in the park. Jodi suggested having 1 hour programs that would assure accurate and positive information would be distributed. She asked the group for input and suggestions. The group seemed to like quick ½ hour presentations that could be done during employee lunch breaks, as well as CD/DVD presentations that could be used during staff training. There was a noted concern from members of the audience that call centers need information now / ASAP. In-kind production assistance will be required to script / produce the training CD/DVD.

Public Relations Partners Mike Mitchell with Partners Creative for Glacier Country, Lisa Jones with LJ Communications, Inc. for the Whitefish CVB, and Sarah Lawlor, Public Information Officer with Travel Montana presented ideas for publicity regarding road rehabilitation and flood damage.

The group would like to focus on the "secret season" of the park including fall and spring. They will pitch stories about backpacking, biking, kayaking, birding, wildlife viewing, nature walks, unique drives, heli-tours (not supported by the NPS due to the long-range master plan desire to have helicopter tours over the park phased out altogether), and more. They would use tactics like press trips, story pitching, and media blitzes to spread the word.

Sarah Lawlor with Travel Montana presented ideas for talking points, see attached. Comments and suggestions on the talking points can be emailed to Sarah at slawlor@mt.gov by **February 9, 2007**.

The group discussed ideas about rack cards and brochures to be used by staff to educate visitors. Amy Vanderbilt said that the park has some mitigation dollars for the rack cards and other select priority projects such as a SuperHost 'Tool Kit' that includes training DVDs, brochures, talking points, etc.

Given the ongoing federal government Continuing Resolution to operate this fiscal year (FY 2007) under last year's budgeted amounts for FY 2006, there is some ongoing uncertainty about availability of funds for outreach materials from the \$50 million designated for the Sun Road project, but this question will hopefully be resolved very soon.

With regard to costs and payment for materials, Amy stated that a 'lions share of proposed Sun Road outreach expenses would be born by the park but the NPS will need to continue to rely on professional assistance from the tourism sector for the development of mutually beneficial collateral materials and tools.

Amy proposed development of a technical work group for ongoing communications and outreach during the Sun Road rehabilitation. This group will include technical and organizational representatives from the following: NPS, FHWA, DEA, Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission, area CVBs, Travel Montana, and park concessioners). A formal charter will be necessary and quarterly or bi-annual meetings will be held for the next few years to keep the momentum moving forward. This work group will be retired as the Sun Road project nears completion. If anyone wishes to be part of this group, contact Amy at 888-5838 or email at amy_vanderbilt@nps.gov by **February 9, 2007**.